DNA

STORY AND ART BY RACHEL UILDRIKS

SEQUENCE: ZERO SEGMENT: BLOOD

HI, IRIS?

THE SURGERY HASN'T STARTED YET, HAS IT?

ALRIGHT, GOOD.

THE ONE WE ALL THOUGHT WAS JUST LATE?

HE'S TURNING ***BLACK.***

LIKE, AROUND THE EYES, AND STUFF.

HE JUST NEEDS TO HAVE SOME ***TESTS*** DONE OR SOMETHING, AND I ***REALLY*** WANNA GET THAT OUT OF THE WAY AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. FOR HIS SAKE, MOSTLY.

I KNOW.

SERIOUSLY!?

WHAT ***ELSE*** ARE YOU DOING TONIGHT THAT YOU CAN'T POSTPONE IT FOR ***AN HOUR?***

HANG ON.

DON'T GO ANYWHERE.

BACK, SORRY.

LOOK, I THINK IT'D BE BETTER ANYWAY IF YOU'D...

WOULD IT BE *WEIRD* IF I TURNED THAT PILLOW CASE INTO A HAT AND WORE IT?

UM. PROBABLY?

WHAT DO YOU NEED A *HAT* FOR?

WHO *CARES* IF YOU'RE TURNING THE WRONG COLOR? YOU DON'T NEED TO HIDE IT.

PEOPLE ARE GONNA START BULLYING ME.

YOU PICK FIGHTS ALL THE TIME.

THAT'S DIFFERENT.

I MEAN, YEAH, I LIKE PICKING FIGHTS, BUT IF *I'M* THE TARGET?

I DON'T *WANNA* BE LIKE...

MMM.

... IT'S JUST...

... DIFFERENT.

I DON'T THINK YOU HAVE ANYTHING TO WORRY ABOUT.

YOU PROBABLY JUTHT NEED A SHOT, AND *THEN* YOU'LL TURN WHITE.

I HOPE YOU'RE RIGHT.

I DON'T WANNA GROW UP LOOKING LIKE A GIRL.

I'M NOT ONE.

MILO SAYS YOU CAN'T GROW UP LOOKING LIKE A GIRL IF YOU'RE NOT ONE, SO STOP WORRYING.

LUKAS, MILO ISN'T—

ALRIGHT.

MANAGED TO TALK HER INTO LETTING YOU GET SOME TESTS DONE TODAY.

BUT WE DON'T HAVE A LOT OF TIME, SO WE HAVE TO GO NOW.

I'M READY.

HEH.

Y'KNOW...

... IF YOU WANT, LIKE, AN *ACTUAL HAT*, I'M PRETTY SURE I HAVE A BEANIE IN THE OFFICE YOU CAN BORROW.

I MEAN, PUTTING *ANYTHING* ON YOUR HEAD IS JUST GONNA DRAW ATTENTION TO YOU, BUT IT'S LESS WEIRD THAN A PILLOW CASE.

C-CA... C-CAN I--

WHAT?

HE *JUST* WANTS TO KNOW IF HE CAN COME WITH ME.

WHY?

PROLLY 'CUZ HE--

I WASN'T ASKING YOU.

...

THAT'S WHAT I THOUGHT.

YOU'RE GONNA BE, WHAT, *8 YEARS OLD* IN ANOTHER FOUR MONTHS?

JUST LEARN TO SPEAK ALREADY, *NOBODY* HAS THE PATIENCE FOR THIS CRAP.

I-I--

YOU WHAT?

I-I--

WHAT NOW?

I'M THORRY!

IF YOU WERE SORRY, YOU'D WORK ON THAT STUPID LISP!

JAY!

WHAT IS YOUR PROBLEM!?

HEY~~!

WE'RE WASTING TIME, C'MON.

I... TAKE IT YOU HAVE A FEW HUNCHES ALREADY?
ONE OR TWO.
THE BETTER ONE OF WHICH REQUIRES A KARYOTYPE TO DIAGNOSE.

BUT I DON'T KNOW HOW TO RUN THAT TEST.

... YOU DON'T?
NOPE.

YOU NEED A GENETICIST.

I WAS *TRYING* TO TELL YOU THAT ON THE PHONE, BUT YOU WERE JUST *SO* ADAMANT ABOUT *INCONVENIENCING EVERYONE.*

SO I *GUESS* YOU'RE LUCKY MY GENETICIST FRIEND CHERYL OWES ME A FAVOR.

HS...

I-IS SHE COMING FROM THE EAST FACILITY...?

FROM HOME, ACTUALLY. HER SHIFT ENDED TWO HOURS AGO.

YOU OWE *BOTH* OF US A FAVOR NOW, I HOPE YOU KNOW.

BANG

FOR FUTURE REFERENCE, THERE *IS* A LAB HERE, BUT WE STOPPED USING IT FOR BLOOD RELATED TESTS TWO YEARS AGO.

I'M SUPPOSED TO SEND ALL BLOOD SAMPLES EASTWARD.

BUT I UNDERSTAND HOW YOU COULD GET CONFUSED. IT'S NOT *YOUR JOB* TO KNOW THAT.

CLICK!

...

WAIT.

I-IRIS, WAIT A SEC...

I HAVE H.S...

... WELL, ENTIRE GENOME.. AND.. STUFF

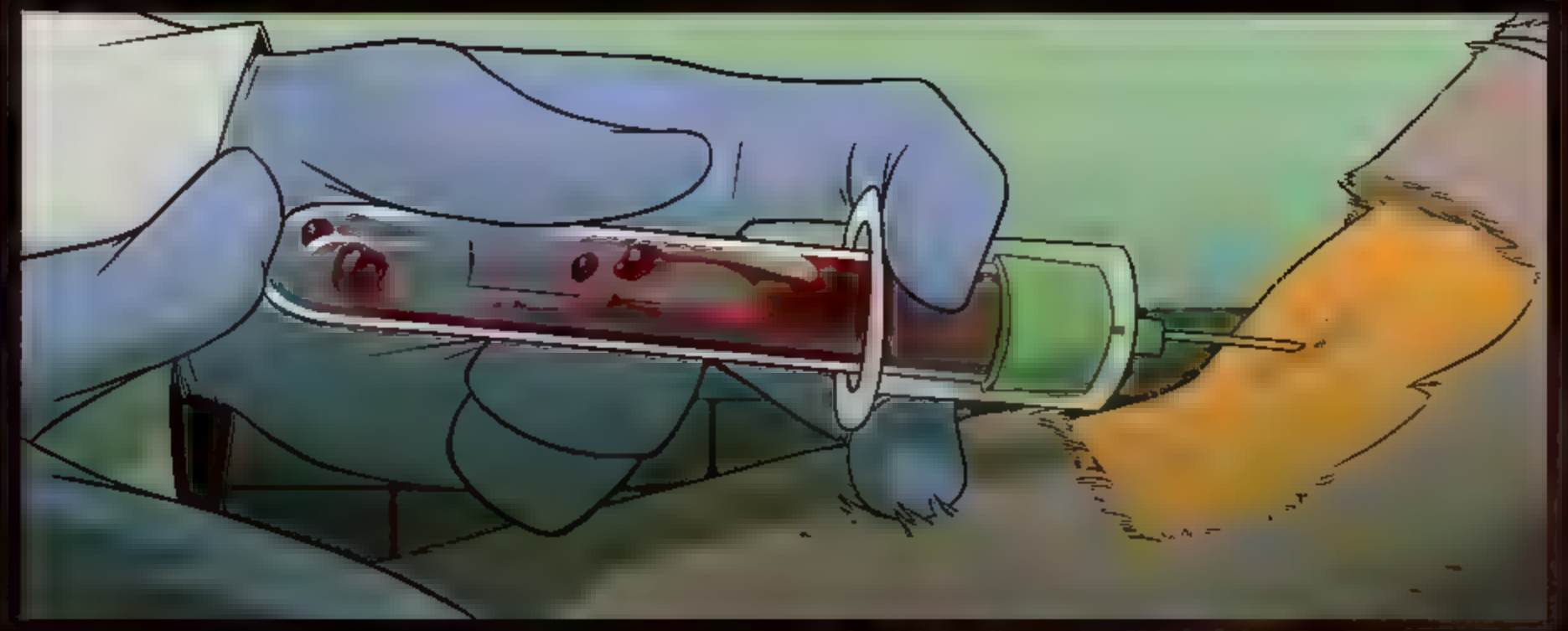
... RIGHT HERE.

HIS... H-HIS EVERYTHING, IT'S ALL NORMAL, SEE?

S-SO, UM.

MAYBE THE PROBLEM IS SOMETHING WE COULD TEST FOR MORE EASILY HERE?

WITHOUT... W-*WITHOUT* CALLING SOMEBODY FROM HOME..?



D-DID YULL HEA ME
ARE YOU SERIOUSLY TRYING--

CRACK

--TO CHANGE YOUR MIND ABOUT ALL TH S AFTER THAT FUSS YOU MADE ON THE PHONE?

BECAUSE I ALREADY HAVE THE SAMPLE, AND CHERYL'S ALREADY COM NG. IT'S A LITTLE LATE.

WHERE DID YOU--?

WHOA, UH.

ARE YOU OKAY?

WHY WOULDN'T I BE?

YOU'RE HIDING IN THE CORNER.

I'M FINE.

TH-THERE WAS JUST..

A SPIDER

.. ON IT.

.. IF IT BROKE, THEY'LL REPLACE T.

I KNOW THAT

S-SO, UM.

IF HE'S NORMAL, THEN-

HE'S NOT

I LOOKED THAT UP RIGHT AFTER YOU CALLED

I DUNNO *WHOSE* INFORMATION THAT IS WE'VE GOT, BUT IT'S DEFINITELY NOT HIS IF HE LOOKS LIKE *THIS*.

D'YOU UNDERSTAND WHY I WANT A KARYOTYPE NOW, OR ARE YOU GONNA KEEP SQUIRMING?

I DO.

I'M SORRY.

I'M STUPID

IF YOU WORK HERE, YOU'RE **NOT** STUPID, NOW KNOCK IT OFF.

... SEE IF YOU CAN LOOK UP WHO WAS MONITORING THE OUTPUT DOWN IN GENESIS WHEN HIS GENOME WAS BEING ASSEMBLED

WHEN THIS NEW KARYOTYPE IS CONFIRMED, I'LL NEED TO REPORT THE R SCREW UP.

SH. SHOULD I SCHEDULE A FULL RE-SEQUENCING FOR HIM, TOO?

... THE 5TH SHOULD BE OPEN.

... ACTUALLY, NO, I'LL DO IT MYSELF WHEN THE TEST RESULTS ARE IN. THEY'RE GONNA WANT ME TO EXPLAIN ANYWAY.

...?

20:26
Tuesday, July 29

Lisa Ito
ughh almost 4got its ur bday

Lisa Ito
; do smthn 2day or just sulk?

Lisa Ito
wat night shift u prolly slept? i hope??

Lisa Ito
imma send u cat pix bc u like those

Lisa Ito
hit me up when ur shifts done miss u xx

THE SEQUENCING **HAS** TO BE DONE IN THE EAST FACILITY WITH A ***BIG MACHINE*** WE DON'T HAVE HERE, BY THE WAY.

SO DON'T TRY TO BULLY **ME** INTO DOING IT INSTANTLY FOR YOU LIKE YOU DID TONIGHT

I LEGIT CAN'T

GOD...

I'M SORRY I--

CHERYL!

WELCOME TO MY SHIFT! GO AHEAD AND GET SET UP IN THE LAB; I'LL BE N THERE IN A MOMENT

TH-THANK --FOR--

COLLINS, RIGHT? I'M STICKING MY NECK OUT COMING DOWN HERE LIKE THIS, Y'KNOW.

UH.

SORRY

I DIDN'T KNOW SHE'D... I-IT JUST SEEMED URGENT.

KARYOTYPES ARE PRETTY PAINLESS THESE DAYS, SO. RELAX, IT'S NO PROBLEM.

ESPECIALLY SINCE I FINALLY GET TO SEE A LUX, INSTEAD OF JUST THE BLOOD.

OR A BODY.

UM, W-WE CALL THEM Xs, ACTUALLY.

I LIKE "LUX" BETTER TOO, "X" IS JUST...

SIGH

LEFTOVER FAMILIAR TERMINOLOGY FROM MY... F FORMER BOSS.

OH, WAIT A MINUTE. *YOU'RE* THE GUY WHO GOT DETERRED A FEW YEARS BACK, AREN'T YOU?

UH..

OH, HONEY, NO.

MORE LIKE A DECADE AGO, BUT YEAH.

WHY?

I *KNEW* I RECOGNIZED YOUR NAME! WE'VE ACTUALLY MET BEFORE

YOU GO BY EJAY, NOT ERIC, RIGHT?

ERM.. I USED TO, IT'S JUST JAY NOW.

I REMEMBER YOU HAD SHORT HAIR AND BRACES THEN, I THOUGHT YOU WERE A TEENAGER

AHAH, YEAH, S-SO DID EVERYBODY.

WELL, THANK YOU FOR GETTING RID OF DIETER LIKE, *SINCERELY.*

I'M GLAD TO SEE HE DIDN'T SCARE YOU OFF

BY THE WAY, GO AHEAD AND CALL THEM LUXES. IT'S WHAT THEY DO UP NORTH.

EVERY TIME DIETER COMES UP, I'M GLAD I NEVER MET HIM.

YEAH. THE DUDE WAS...

... HE WAS A *MONSTER.*

LEON'S *NEVER* GONNA BE NORMAL, BECAUSE OF HIM.

YOU DIDN'T MISS OUT ON MUCH. I JUST WISH LEON COULD UNLIVE ALL THAT.

I DON'T LIKE THINKING ABOUT IT

Oh. Bad day?
Yes.
Wanna talk about it?
Lost my shit in front of a coworker. And now we're talking about my ex-supervisor. Kinda wanna drop dead.
... ANYWAY.
DO YOU DRINK COFFEE, ERIC?
I-IT.
IT'S
HM?
... N-NOT IMPORTANT.
YEAH. I DO
WELL, COFFEE'S IN THE OFFICE.
ONE OF THE SURGEONS ARE WAIT NG IN THERE, TOO.
SHE'S PROBABLY GETTING BORED.
YOU SHOULD GO KEEP HER COMPANY, S NCE IT'S *YOUR* FAULT
I'D RATHER SET.
S-SIT, IN THE HALL ALONE, ACTUALLY DO WHAT YOU TOLD ME, WITH THE, UH.
LOOK'NG UP THAT GENESIS GUY THING.
SU T YOURSELF

THERE ARE CAMERAS IN THIS ROOM. IF EITHER OF YOU ACT UP, SOMEONE WILL KNOW ABOUT IT.

BEHAVE.

THIS STUPID THING YOU MADE ME WEAR DOESN'T HAVE A REAL BACK TO IT

I'M NOT GETTING UP FOR ANYTHING.

WELL, I MEAN, IF ERIC'S NOT GONNA STAY AND WATCH YOU, I GOTTA MAKE SURE YOU KNOW *SOMEBODY* IS.

THIS SHOULD TAKE UNDER AN HOUR

D-DID YOU HEAR WHAT THAT LADY SAID!?

WHO, IRIS?

... WHY WOULD I JUST CALL IRIS--?

NO, THE BLONDE ONE CHERYL.

THERE WAS A BLONDE LADY IN HERE?

AMAZING.

NEVER MIND

I'M, UH...

ACTUALLY KINDA GLAD YOU'RE HERE.

WHY'S THAT?

BECAUSE THEY'RE GOING TO CUT INTO MY BRAIN TODAY, AND YOU MADE THEM PUT IT OFF FOR A LITTLE LONGER

OH.

S... SO WHAT'S WITH THE P'LLOW CASE AND THE TESTS?

THERE'S SOMETHING WRONG WITH ME.

WHAT?

I DUNNO, THAT'S... SORTA WHAT THE TESTS ARE FOR

AH. RIGHT

WHY'RE YOU GETTING BRAIN SURGERY?

THEY .. THINK I'M SUPPOSED TO HAVE POWERS, AND THEY WANT TO SEE IF THEY CAN GET THEM WORKING. BECAUSE IF THEY CAN, THEY THINK I'LL ALSO START LOSING WEIGHT

SO THEY NEED TO GO INSIDE YOUR HEAD FOR THAT?

I GUESS YEAH.

WEIRD

... L-LIKE, THEY ALREADY DO A LOT OF EXTRA TESTS ON ME, B-BECAUSE OF MY SIZE, AND STUFF..

.. BUT IT'S BEEN SO MUCH WORSE LATELY, AND NOBODY WOULD TELL ME WHY.

I THINK THEY WERE GETTING READY FOR THIS.

IS THAT WHY YOU'VE BEEN GONE SO MUCH?

EXTRA TESTS?

MMHM.

WHAT THEY DID TO ME A WEEK AGO WAS AWFUL.

IT WAS SOMETHING THEY COULDN'T DO HERE, SO WE HAD TO TAKE A TRAIN.

I'M PRETTY SURE WE WENT TO THE EAST FACILITY...?

I HAD TO BE MUZZLED THE ENTIRE TIME, AND LIKE, THAT SUCKS ON ITS OWN, RIGHT? BUT IT WAS ALSO THE MIDDLE OF THE DMV, SO I DIDN'T GET MUCH SLEEP.

I SWEAR, IF THERE'S A NEXT TIME, YOU WON'T NEED RESTRAINTS.

TREATING YOU LIKE THIS IS *NAUSEATING.*

AND JAY JUST... WOULDN'T STOP *WHINING.*

I FORGOT THIS WAS EVEN A REQUIRED THING UNTIL...

... WELL, *TODAY.* NOT THAT IT WOULD'VE MADE A DIFFERENCE, HAD I REMEMBERED. I NEED BEN HERE.

I CAN WRITE UP ALL THE NECESSARY INFORMATION AND REASONING BEHIND THE CHANGE JUST FINE, BUT I NEED *HIM* TO ACTUALLY PRESENT IT.

NOT E-MAIL.

I'D DO IT IF I COULD, BUT IT'S A SAFETY ISSUE SO IT'D NEED TO BE DISCUSSED IN PERSON.

AND LAST TIME I TRIED THAT, I UM...

... S-STARTED CRYING, AND HAD TO LEAVE.

AND THAT EMBARRASSING SHIT DOESN'T HAPPEN TO BEN, SO..

... S-SO THERE'S ALWAYS THIS . SIX MONTH LAG IN PROGRESS WHEN HE'S GONE, BECAUSE I M...

.. I'M FUCKING WORTHLESS, HEH.

I COULDN'T TELL HIM TO SHUT UP BECAUSE OF THE MUZZLE, SO I WAS JUST... *TRAPPED* THERE. LISTENING.

BEN SHOULD HAVE MY JOB, REALLY. LIKE, I COME UP WITH...

... P-PRETTY MUCH EVERYTHING, BUT HE'S ACTUALLY ABLE TO GET IT *DONE*.

AND AS FAR AS THEY KNOW, IT'S ALL HIS IDEAS ANYWAY, SO THEY'D...

... THEY'D PROBABLY *LOVE* TO HAVE HIM IN THIS POSITION, INSTEAD OF ME.

... AND PEOPLE WHO CARE ABOUT HIM.

HE HAS A FAMILY AND.

BUT THEY'D NEED HIM TO BE HERE ALL THE TIME FOR THAT, AND HE CAN'T.

AND I DON'T

TH-THERE'S MY AUNT, I GUESS, BUT SHE ONLY CALLS TO GUILT TRIP MONEY OUT OF ME.

I HAVEN'T EVEN BEEN *OFF* THIS ISLAND SINCE I BEGAN WORKING HERE, AND THAT WAS..

... GOD, OVER 11 YEARS AGO NOW!

I-I DON'T EVEN THINK I'D BE *ABLE* TO FUNCTION IN THE REAL WORLD ANYMORE, IF I WENT BACK.

HE ONLY STOPPED ONCE HE REALIZED HIS LIFE IS DEPRESSING, AND *NOBODY* WANTS TO HEAR ABOUT IT.

I-I'M *SO* SORRY, I DON'T GET TO--

--YOU DON'T WANT TO HEAR *ANY* OF THIS.

I-I JUST... FEEL GUILTY ABOUT *EVERYTHING* GOING ON RIGHT NOW, AND I HAVEN'T SLEPT IN LIKE, TWO DAYS, A-AND

... I DON'T KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING ANYMORE.

I'M SORRY, R GEL.

BUT WHEN WE *FINALLY* GOT THERE, WE MET THIS DOCTOR I'D NEVER SEEN BEFORE.

HEY, THERE! ERIC, RIGHT?

I WAS HOPING YOU'D GET HERE JUST A LITTLE BIT SOONER!

OH. S-SORRY, I'M NOT LATE, AM I?

NO, NOT AT ALL! I'VE JUST ONLY EVER SEEN THEM IN THE TANKS DOWNSTAIRS BEFORE NOW.

SO, ABOUT THE SCAN...

UM!

B-*BEFORE* YOU GET ME IN TROUBLE...

... HE CAN UNDERSTAND YOU, AND HE'S NOT SUPPOSED TO KNOW WHAT'S GOING ON YET

REALLY? CAN IT SPEAK, TOO?

THERE WERE *A LOT* OF NEW PEOPLE, ACTUALLY.

ALL...

... STARING AT ME.

AND THEN THE *WORST* OF IT CAME.

THERE WAS THIS... *MACHINE*. THEY MADE ME LAY DOWN IN IT.

BANG

BANG

BANG

BANG

BANG

IT WAS SO LOUD!

AND *SMALL*.

I THOUGHT IT WOULDN'T END!

JAY TOLD ME ON THE WAY BACK IT WAS A BRAIN SCAN.

THEY DIDN'T EVEN LET ME SEE THE PICTURES OF IT.

THEY JUST MADE ME SIT OUTSIDE A ROOM, WHILE THEY TALKED ABOUT...

... WHATEVER, I DUNNO. PROBABLY SURGERY.

THE WHOLE THING WAS *AWFUL*.

H-HEY! WE CAN *FINALLY* LEAVE!

I BETCHA CAN'T WAIT TO GET THAT STUPID THING OFF YOUR--

--OH.

OH, NO.

I DIDN'T THINK IT COULD GET ANY WORSE, BUT, WELL...

... NOW I'M HERE.

WHERE THEY'RE PLANNING TO CUT MY HEAD OPEN, RIGHT IN THE NEXT ROOM.

AND THERE'S *NOTHING* I CAN DO ABOUT IT

I *KNEW* SOMETHING WAS DIFFERENT TODAY, TOO.

JAY WOULDN'T SAY *ANYTHING*, HE JUST... KEPT PRETENDING TO TEXT, OR SOMETHING. TO AVOID ME.

SOUNDS ROUGH.

SIRIUS...

... DO...

... YOU EVER WONDER WHAT WE ARE?

LIKE, WE'RE *HUMAN* IN EVERY WAY EXCEPT PHYSICAL, AS FAR AS I CAN TELL, BUT...

.. WE'RE NOT..

.. *TREATED* THAT WAY.

AND Y'KNOW THAT EAST FACILITY DOCTOR I MENTIONED? HE DIDN'T EVEN KNOW I COULD TALK.

I BET THAT CHERYL LADY EARLIER DIDN'T, EITHER

A-AND JAY AND BEN CLEARLY AREN'T OUR *REAL* PARENTS, LIKE ..

... THIS IS THEIR *JOB* TO WATCH US, THEY'RE JUST *CARETAKERS*, SO...

... WHERE *ARE* OUR PARENTS? WHY AREN'T *THEY* TAK NG CARE OF US?

ARE THEY EVEN ALIVE?

DID...

... DID WE EVER EVEN *HAVE* PARENTS?

ARE YOU LISTENING TO ME, OR DID YOU FALL ASLEEP?

I DON'T WANNA TALK ABOUT THIS.

WHY?

BECAUSE YOU MADE OUR *LIVES* SOUND *DISTURBING?*

I MEAN. I DID THAT ON *PURPOSE.*

BECAUSE OUR LIVES *ACTUALLY ARE* DISTURBING.

YOU *DO* SEE THAT, RIGHT?

I DUNNO.

YOU D—

—SIRIUS, WHY D'YOU THINK WE'RE HERE?

I DON'T KNOW, RIGEL.

I'M SEVEN.

WHY IS ANYBODY HERE?

WHY AM I ME, AND NOT YOU?

WHAT IF *GOATS* HAD TEETH?

THERE AREN'T *ACTUALLY* ANY CAMERAS IN HERE, IF THAT'S THE PROBLEM.

CAN—

—CAN YOU *PLEASE* TAKE ME SERIOUSLY?

... THAT WAS AN ACCIDENT

YOU BROKE ORION'S ARM LAST WEEK. I DON'T WANNA HEAR A WORD OUT OF YOU.

EVERYTHING LEADING UP TO IT SURE WASN'T

.. IT WAS THE SAME DAY AS THE BRAIN SCAN.

SO?

SO I WANTED TO FEEL BETTER, AND BEATING UP ON HIM DOES THAT FOR ME.

.. I DIDN'T *MEAN* TO BREAK HIS ARM. IT JUST *HAPPENED*.

LIKE, *REALLY*, HOW IS IT *MY* FAULT HE HAS *TOOTHPICK BONES?*

IT'S JUST..

... NOT *FAIR*..

.. TO BLAME *ME*..

.. FOR THINGS *I* DO...

.. WHEN ASKING "WHY" JUST GETS IGNORED, AND SAYING "NO" IS *MEANINGLESS*,

EVERYTHING IS HORRIBLE, *ALL* THE TIME.

WHAT *ELSE* AM I SUPPOSED TO DO?

HHHHHHHHHH...

IT'S NOT EVEN GONNA BE OVER WHEN THEY'RE DONE WITH IT, I'M GONNA BE STUCK HERE AN ENTIRE *WEEK* FOR MONITORING.

I JUST DON'T WANT ANYMORE TESTS, AND I DON'T WANT THIS *STUPID* SURGERY!

AND THEN IF IT DOESN'T WORK, THEY'RE JUST GONNA CUT ME OPEN *AGAIN!*

I DON'T EVEN *WANT* POWERS IN THE FIRST PLACE!

I FEEL LIKE--

... I-I FEEL LIKE I'M MORE *HUMAN* WITHOUT THEM, AND I LIKE THAT.

LIKE, I COULD DO WITHOUT BEING *FAT*, BUT...

... WHY'RE YOU EVEN TALKING TO ME ABOUT THIS?

BECAUSE YOU'RE HERE, AND WE'RE ALONE, AND I *NEED* SOMEBODY ELSE TO START THINKING ABOUT THESE THINGS.

IT'S NOT LIKE YOU'RE SPECIAL.

IF ORION WAS HERE INSTEAD, I'D BE TALKING TO HIM LIKE THIS, TOO.

I JUST WANTED SOMEONE TO LISTEN.

BUT YOU'RE *NOT*.

YOU'VE BEEN TRYING TO BLOW ME OFF.

THAT'S BECAUSE I HATE YOU.

I KNOW! I HATE YOU, TOO!

BUT IF I'M *RIGHT*,

AND THERE *IS* SOMETHING GOING ON—

OH, MY *GOD*.

WHAT?

I'M JUST *SICK* OF HEARING YOU TALK.

YOU'RE A *COMPLETE ASS*,

AND YOU DESERVE *EVERYTHING* THAT'S HAPPENING TO YOU.

HEY!

HOW MUCH LONGER--

--UNTIL...

KNOCK KNOCK

COOL, THANKS.

I'M TAKING A NAP

.. WHY WOULD YOU SAY SOMETHING LIKE THAT?

.. LIKE WHAT?

WELL, YOU CALLED ME A *SWEAR*, FOR ONE.

WAIT, ARE YOU *KIDDING* ME?

NO.

I'M NOT

YOU'RE LUCKY I CAN'T GET UP.

AFTER EVERYTHING YOU DO? TO *EVERYBODY?*

YOU'RE LUCKY I DIDN'T CALL YOU *WORSE.*

BUT IF YOU *REALLY* DON'T GET IT, THEN FINE!

I GOT *LOTS* MORE THAN JUST THE ARM!

LIKE REMEMBER HOW YOU MADE MY LITTLE BROTHER *CRY* ON HIS *FIRST DAY?*

OR HOW YOU KILLED A BUNCH OF *WORMS*, AND THREW THEM AT BEN WHEN YOU GOT CAUGHT?

OR, LIKE, THE *WORST* ONE, THAT TIME YOU TRIED TO DROWN ORION IN THE MUD, *JUST* BECAUSE HE CALLED YOU *FAT?*

DO YOU *REALLY* NOT UNDERSTAND WHY I *DON'T* WANNA LISTEN TO YOU?

HE DOES! HE HAS *NIGHTMARES* ABOUT *DROWNING!*

... THE LAST ONE WAS *THREE YEARS* AGO.

WHO *CARES* ANY—

I HAVE NIGHTMARES TOO!

ABOUT THIS CRAP—

—GETTING FORCED ON ME—

—ALL THE TIME!

AND NOBODY EVER GOES EASY ON ME, SO I DUNNO WHY I SHOU—

BECAUSE!

YOU DON'T! GET TO HURT PEOPLE! JUST BECAUSE OTHER PEOPLE HURT YOU!

...IF ORION DOESN'T WANNA BE A PUNCHING BAG, THEN MAYBE HE SHOULDN'T ACT LIKE ONE.

HE DOESN'T.

HE *DOES!*

AND PUNCHING BAGS GET PUNCHED, SO I HAVEN'T DONE ANYTHING WRONG.

HE'S JUST *WEAK* AND WON'T HIT BACK.

YOU BASICALLY JUST TOLD ME YOU *BREAK DOWN* AND *HURT PEOPLE* JUST BECAUSE YOU FEEL BAD!

THAT'S WEAKNESS!

AND IF ORION WERE WEAK LIKE YOU,

YOU'D BE *DEAD* RIGHT NOW.

MAYBE THAT WOULDN'T BE SUCH A BAD THING.

THANK YOU SO MUCH AGAIN FOR COMING DOWN HERE ON SUCH SHORT NOTICE.

IT'S NO PROBLEM AT ALL!

NO, HON, I MEAN IT

I OWE YOU LUNCH.

OR AT LEAST A COFFEE.

YOU, UH...

... MADE TONIGHT'S INCONVENIENCE BEARABLE.

I KNOW I WAS GOING OFF IN THERE ALREADY, BUT...

AHAH, NO, I GET IT

HEY!

D'YOU KNOW WHAT'S WRONG WITH ME, OR NOT?

SO I'LL SEE YOU THIS WEEKEND?

I WANNA GET MY SHOT AND LEAVE.

MMHM.

GOOD LUCK WITH WHAT REMAINS OF THIS MESS

HAHA, THANKS G'NIGHT, HON.

...

...HHHHHOW DO I EXPLAIN THIS TO A 7 YEAR OLD...?

IF I WERE YOU, I WOULDN'T EVEN TELL HIM.

N-NO!

NO, OF COURSE NOT.

BUT HE SHOULD KNOW.

AM I GONNA DIE?

... OKAY.

SIRIUS, C'MON, WE'RE GOING.

WAIT, WHAT? NO, I WANNA KNOW WHAT'S--

ARE YOU *SURE* YOU DON'T WANNA HEAR THIS IN PRIVATE?

'KAY, LET'S GO.

ERIC, WAIT A SEC.

WHEN BOTH OUR SHIFTS ARE OVER WOULD YOU MIND MEETING ME IN THE COMMON AREA?

FOURTH FLOOR?

I DON'T THINK WE UNDERSTAND EACH OTHER VERY WELL, AND I'D LIKE TO DISCUSS THAT WITH YOU.

... N-NO, I...

... I THINK I UNDERSTAND YOUR PROBLEMS WITH ME *PERFECTLY*, ACTUALLY, AND.

... THIS IS JUST HOW I AM. I'M SORRY.

B-BUT, UM. ONE THING

I KNOW WHAT MY ID AND EVERYTHING SAY, BUT MY NAME HASN'T BEEN 'ERIC' SINCE I WAS A LITTLE KID.

IT'S JAY.

I DIDN'T REALIZE IT MATTERED.

W-WELL, I MEAN...

... I DON'T *LIKE* CORRECTING PEOPLE, IT'S ALWAYS... *SUPER* AWKWARD. B-BUT.

'ERIC' IS MY DAD'S NAME, AND...

... I DON'T WANT TO EXPLAIN WHY, IT JUST...

... HURTS.

S-SO PLEASE CALL ME JAY.

S-SORRY, THANK YOU, BYE

KER-SHUT!

.. UM, S-SO...

... ARE YOU ALL READY FOR YOUR SURGERY NOW?

JAY... KEPT INSISTING YOU NEEDED TIME TO PROCESS IT, ON THE PHONE.

THUS THIS WHOLE DELAY

.. YOU'RE GONNA BE POKING AROUND IN MY BRAIN, RIGHT?

NOT ME SPECIFICALLY, BUT THAT'S THE GIST OF THINGS, YEAH.

IS...

... I-IS THERE ANY WAY YOU COULD..

.. *CHANGE* HOW I AM, SO THE OTHER KIDS WILL LIKE ME?

ARE YOU GONNA TELL ME WHAT THE PROBLEM IS NOW, OR WHAT?

... D'D YOU... HAPPEN TO HEAR WHAT CHERYL SA'D?

NO, AND I DON'T CARE.

ARE WE GONNA COME BACK LATER TO GET MY HA'R F'XED?

... I KNOW RIGEL CAUGHT IT, HE DIDN'T SAY ANYTH'NG?

OH MY GOD, JAY!

I-I'M SORRY, I JUST . DON'T KNOW HOW TO... EXPLAIN

I DON'T.. WANT TO CONFUSE YOU OR.. MESS UP

... OKAY, WELL, AVOIDING IT IS *SCARING* ME, SO MAYBE TRY SAYING ANYTHING.

I'M. SORRY, U-UM..

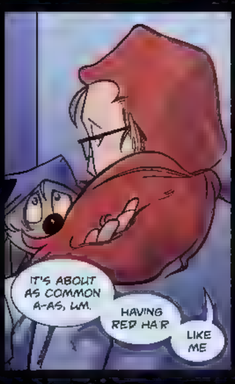
... S'R'US, YOU'RE, UH...

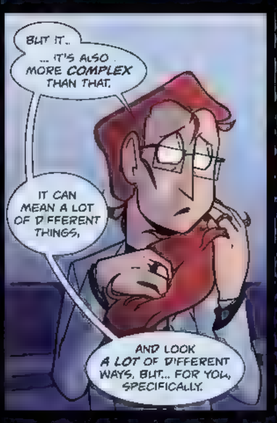
... YOU'RE INTERSEX.

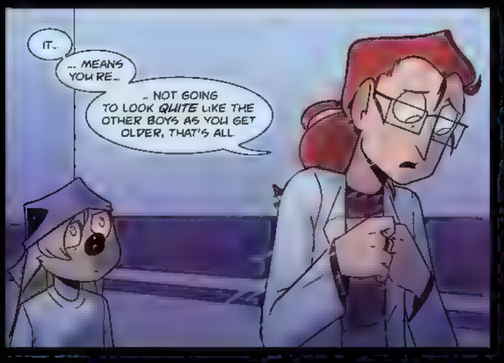
WHAT.. DOES THAT MEAN?
IS T BAD?

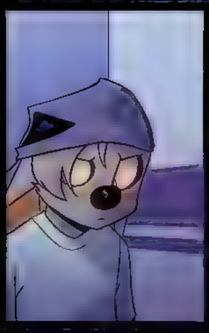
N-NO, IT'S..

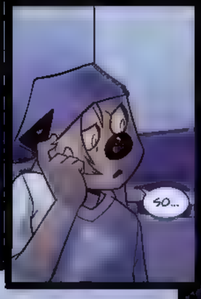
.. IT'S JUST..
.. SOMETHING THAT HAPPENS SOMET.MES.
NOT GOOD OR BAD, JUST.. A THING.


IT'S ABOUT AS COMMON A-AS, UM.
HAVING RED HA R
LIKE ME


BUT IT..
... IT'S ALSO MORE COMPLEX THAN THAT.
IT CAN MEAN A LOT OF D'FFERENT THINGS,
AND LOOK A LOT OF DIFFERENT WAYS, BUT... FOR YOU, SPECIFICALLY.


IT..
... MEANS YOU RE..
.. NOT GOING TO LOOK QUITE LIKE THE OTHER BOYS AS YOU GET OLDER, THAT'S ALL




SO...

.. YOU MEAN I'M GONNA LOOK LIKE A GIRL INSTEAD..?

UM.
I.. WOULDN'T QUITE PUT IT LIKE THAT--
BUT I'M NOT A GIRL, THOUGH!

I-I'M NOT--

--I'M NOT SAYING YOU ARE P-PLEASE DON'T YELL AT

I'M A BOY!!

OKAY.

AND I WANNA LOOK LIKE A BOY

OKAY

...

... RIS HAS A WAY TO FIX IT, DOESN'T SHE?

LIKE, THERE'S A SHOT FOR THIS?

THAT SHE CAN GIVE ME?

AND *THEN* I'LL LOOK LIKE THE OTHER BOYS?

... JAY?

I DON'T. TH-THINK SO, NO.

BUT I DON'T WANT THIS!

I'M GONNA HAVE TO... T-TO TAKE YOU--

--T-TAKE YOU DOWN FOR *TESTS* NEXT WEEK, S-SO THEY CAN--

NO

...I-I'M *NOT* A GIRL,

I D-DON'T...

..W-WANT..

I DON'T *WANNA* BE LIKE RIGEL--

--I DON'T WANT *TESTS!!*

I DON'T...

I'M SO, SO SORRY.

TODAY HAS JUST BEEN... *REALLY* HORR BLE, AND I..

... I LET THAT MAKE THIS WHOLE THING *TERRIFYING* FOR YOU, DIDN'T I?

C'MON, LOVE, LET'S G-GET OFF TH S.. NASTY FLOOR

WHAT...

..WHAT'S REALLY CHANGED?

Y-YOU'LL STILL HAVE YOUR FRIENDS,

AND YOU'RE STILL YOU,

IT'S JUST..

...YOUR BODY, THAT'S CHANGING.

AND BODIES..

..ARE JUST..

...BODIES. WHAT THEY LOOK LIKE DOESN'T ACTUALLY MEAN ANYTHING--

--IT--IT'S WHAT YOUR BRAIN SAYS ABOUT YOU THAT'S IMPORTANT

N-NOT YOUR LOOKS.

AND YOURS SAYS YOU'RE A BOY, RIGHT?

SO...

..YOU'RE STILL A BOY

NO ONE CAN CHANGE THAT BUT YOU.

YOU'RE JUST DIFFERENT, AND THAT'S FINE.

..NO, IT'S NOT

IF IT WAS, YOU WOULDN'T FORCE RIGEL TO GET SURGERY, OR HATE ORION.

...

THUNK

LOOK

I HAVE *NO CHOICE* IN WHAT HAPPENS TO RIGEL,

AND I *DON'T* HATE ORION

TH-THEN WHY DO YOU ALWAYS YELL AT H--

DON'T.

JAY, ARE YOU OKAY?

THE...

...TH-THE PEOPLE I WORK FOR..

...WELL, EMMOTT, MOSTLY...

..Y-YOU'VE MET HIM AT LEAST ONCE, RIGHT?

NO?

OKAY...

..SEAN EMMOTT

HE'S THIS.. BIG, TALL, OLDER WHITE GUY

THANKFULLY, HE DOESN'T COME AROUND IN PERSON VERY MUCH.

I REVIEW AND SEND OUR REPORTS ABOUT YOU KIDS TO HIM, AND THEN HE TELLS ME WHAT HE WANTS, AND WE TRY TO DO IT

SO... I'M BEN'S AND A COUPLE OTHER PEOPLE'S BOSS, BUT EMMOTT'S MY BOSS.

D'YOU UNDERSTAND SO FAR?

.I GUESS.

WELL, *HE'S* THE ONE WHO WANTS RIGEL TO HAVE TESTS AND SURGERY.

NOT ME I HATE EVERYTHING ABOUT TH S.

AND I DON'T GET ANY SAY IN IT, BECAUSE IT'S A *MEDICAL* THING, AND MY DEPARTMENT FOCUSES ON *SOCIAL* THINGS.

SO PEOPLE LIKE IRIS'S OPINIONS ARE THE IMPORTANT ONES, NOT MINE.

IT DOESN'T MATTER HOW MANY TIMES I POINT OUT THE WAY MED CAL THINGS'RE HANDLED CAUSE *PSYCHOSOCIAL TRAUMA*, EITHER

THEY DO WHAT THEY WANT AND—

EVEN NG.

WHAT'S EVEN WRONG WITH RIGEL'S POWERS, ANYWAY?

N

NOBODY KNOWS.

HE...**SHOULDN'T** HAVE ANY PROBLEMS, BUT HE **DOES**, AND THAT'S WHY HE HAS SO MANY TESTS.

BUT THERE'S JUST

...OBVIOUSLY SOMETHING WE'RE ALL MISSING, AND SINCE HE'S OLD ENOUGH FOR IT NOW

THEY'RE HOPING TAKING A PHYSICAL LOOK INSIDE OF HIS HEAD WILL HELP THEM UNDERSTAND WHAT THAT IS.

BUT

B-BUT FOR YOU--

--UM

W-WE'RE GOING THE LONG WAY BACK, KIDDO, C'MON

F-FOR YOU, EVERYBODY'LL KNOW EXACTLY WHAT THE PROBLEM IS AS SOON AS THEY GET IRIS'S REPORT IN THE MORNING

SO THEY'RE NOT GONNA WANT ANYTHING MAJOR DONE LIKE THEY DO WITH RIGEL

PROBABLY

AT LEAST NOT UNTIL YOU HIT PUBERTY

GOD, I HOPE NOT, THOUGH--THEY SHOULDN'T CARE ABOUT **ANY** OF THIS.

SO WHY'M I GETTING TESTED IN A WEEK, THEN?

BECAUSE WHOEVER WAS.

S-SUPPOSED TO BE DOUBLE CHECKING, UM

THINGS, DIDN'T

S-SO YOUR GENETIC RECORDS ARE WRONG

YOU'LL BE GETTING ANOTHER BLOOD SAMPLE TAKEN TO CORRECT THAT

IT'S JUST ANOTHER NEEDLE, LIKE TODAY

THAT'S NOT SO BAD

R-RIGHT

BUT I.

I-I DON'T WANT TO GIVE YOU FALSE HOPE--I DON'T ACTUALLY KNOW WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN NEXT,

AND WHATEVER THAT IS, THEY CAN ORDER ME TO HIDE IT FROM YOU.

THAT'S WHAT THEY MAKE ME DO TO RIGEL

WHY?

I DON'T KNOW.

I HATE IT.

IT JUST HURTS HUH.
AND IT...
...I-IT HURTS ME.

SO I.

I-I **TRY**, TO TRIP THINGS UP A BIT, W-WHEN I CAN.

LIKE TODAY

IRIS CAN'T *TECHNICALLY* TELL ME 'NO' IF I THINK SOMETHING'S MEDICALLY NOT QUITE RIGHT WITH ONE OF YOU,

NO MATTER HOW MUCH IT INCONVENIENCES HER, OR HOW NON LIFE-THREATENING IT SEEMS TO BE

SHE **NEEDS** TO LET ME BRING YOU KIDS DOWN FOR EXAMINATION NO MATTER WHAT, SO

I FORCED HER INTO LOOKING AT YOU NOW,

EVEN THOUGH I **KNEW** FULL WELL IT WOULD PISS OFF A BUNCH OF PEOPLE AND DELAY RIGEL'S SURGERY,

BECAUSE THAT WAS THE ENTIRE **POINT.**

THEY DIDN'T WANT HIM TO HAVE **ANY** TIME TO PROCESS IT, SO I **MADE** THEM GIVE HIM TIME BY FOLLOWING THEIR RULES.

AND I MEAN.

I EMBARRASSED MYSELF, AND BROKE A TABLET, AND.

AND EVERYTHING WOULD'VE BEEN **A LOT** EASIER IF SHE WOULD'VE JUST

TAKEN THE BLOOD SAMPLE, TOLD US TO GET OUT,

AND THEN SHIPPED IT EASTWARD LATER, LIKE SHE'S **SUPPOSED** TO, INSTEAD OF..

. TAKING ME LITERALLY, AND PUTTING TOGETHER THAT

THAT.

AWKWARD MESS DESIGNED TO **PUNISH** ME

BUT IT.

I—IT WAS THE RIGHT THING TO DO FOR BOTH YOU AND RIGEL, AND THAT'S ALL I CARE ABOUT

JUST

THE POINT I'M... TRYING TO MAKE IS,

IF I NEED TO FORCE THEM TO DELAY SOME

HORRIBLE, INVASIVE MEDICAL PROCEDURE THEY DON'T WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT,

I WILL DO MY BEST TO DO SO.

POTENTIAL HUMILIATION BE DAMNED.

A-ALSO

BEING DIFFERENT ISN'T BAD, SO I DON'T WANT YOU TO THINK **THAT'S** WHY THINGS MIGHT BE CHANGING, OKAY?

IT'S YOUR SITUATION THAT'S BAD, NOT YOU.

SIRIUS, ARE YOU OKAY?

BEN WOULD MAKE ME BETTER.

WH--

H-HE **CAN'T.** I DON'T THINK YOU UNDERSTOOD.

NO.

HE'S THE ONE EVERYONE LIKES, HE'LL FIX IT

HE'S JUST NOT HERE, **YOU** ARE

AND YOU'RE JUST MEAN AND SCARY, FOR NO REASON, LIKE--

--LIKE JUST NOW!

YOU PULLED OUT YOUR OWN HAIR, BEAT YOUR HEAD INTO THE WALL, AND YELLED AT ME, BECAUSE I SAID SOMETHING YOU DIDN'T LIKE!

AND YOU'RE STILL PULLING YOUR HAIR!

YOU DIDN'T EVEN ASK IF THEY COULD FIX IT!

JUST, 'NOPE, THEY CAN'T!'

SO NOW I HAVE TO WAIT UNTIL FREAKING JANUARY FOR BEN TO DO IT INSTEAD!

BECAUSE I KNOW YOU WON'T!

AND Y'KNOW WHY THAT IS, JAY?

IT'S 'CUZ YOU'RE A USELESS PSYCHO!

WELL?

SAY SOMETHING! AM I GROUNDED FOR MOUTHING OFF?

OR ARE YOU GETTING READY TO KICK **ANOTHER** TOOTH OUTTA MY FACE?

C-CAN YOU **PLEASE** NOT YELL AT--?

I'M SORRY!

I didn't MEAN to hurt you. I just PANICKED be
WHY I Kicked him I it just hurts!
AND I Dont UNDERSTAND what my
you All DESERVE BETTER than ME n
uld Just be DEAD i'm BAD and
Die I Dont WANT to feel like
Du is HURT EVERYONE I CARE ABOUT
Myself I'M GONNA
A

I shouldn't be Doing this in front of you.

BEN wouldn't do this.

JM.

IT'S OKAY, JUST JUST GET UP, C'MON

I wish he was here.

JUST TAKE ME BACK TO MY ROOM, THAT'S ALL I WANT

I wish he Didn't Hate me Now.

STOP CRYING

I miss him so much

PLEASE WIPE YOUR NOSE

SORRY

UM. W-WHAT
WHAT HAPPENTH NOW?

NOTHING
I GOTTA WAIT FOR BEN TO GET BACK
BECAUSE JAY IS COMPLETELY WORTHLESS

I MADE HIM CRY FOR YOU, BY THE WAY
OH. GOOD.

KNOCK!
KNOCK!
KNOCK!
GO AWAY, JAY!
SPEAKING OF,

UH

DEFINITELY NOT JAY

OH SORRY

HE ASKED ME TO BRING BREAKFAST TO YOU, THOUGH

AND TO TELL YOU YOU CAN EAT IN YOUR ROOM.

AND HERE'S A NEW PILLOW CASE FOR SOME REASON. ?

WHAT'D YOU DO TO HIM, ANYWAY? HE'S LIKE A ZOMBIE RIGHT NOW

NOTHING HE DIDN'T DESERVE

SO WHY WEREN'T YOU AT BREAKFAST?

IT'S NONE OF YOUR BUSINESS

HE'S GETTING BLACK MARKINGS INSTEAD OF WHITE ONES.

DUDE!

WHAT?

EVERYONE'S GONNA FIND OUT ANYWAY

NOT IF I HIDE IT UNTIL BEN GETS BACK!

BUT THAT'S LIKE, **FOREVER** FROM NOW!

YOU'RE BEING DUMB AND MEAN AND I DON'T GET WHY THIS IS SUCH A BIG DEAL

WELL, OF COURSE **YOU** DON'T GET IT, YOU'RE STILL A **STUPID BABY!**

ARE YOU SURE **HE'TH** THE BABY?

GUYS, **STOP** IT!

SO YOU FINALLY NOTICED YOUR MARKINGS, THEN?

WHAT D'YOU MEAN "FINALLY"?

I NOTICED THEY WERE COMING IN KINDA FUNNY LIKE A WEEK AGO

AND YOU DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING!?

JAY TOLD ME TO WAIT UNTIL YOU BROUGHT IT UP YOURSELF

I SAW IT WHEN I WOKE UP TODAY

CAN I GET A CLOSER LOOK?

I JUST WANNA SEE IF I CAN HELP

SO IT'S AROUND YOUR EYES.

AND YOUR HAIRLINE, AND EAR TIPS

Y'KNOW, IF YOUR HAIR COMES IN BANDED, LIKE CHARLIE'S? YOU MIGHT BE ABLE TO CUT THE BLACK PARTS OFF WHEN IT GETS LONG ENOU--

IT ISN'T GONNA HAVE TIME TO GET LONG ENOUGH.

BEN'S GONNA FIX IT WHEN HE GETS BACK

WHY CAN'T JAY FIX IT?

BECAUSE HE CAN'T DO ANYTHING RIGHT, AND HE'S A LIAR

WHAT DID HE SAY?

HE JUST SAID IT CAN'T BE FIXED. HE DIDN'T GIVE A REASON.

WHY WOULD HE LIE ABOUT THAT?

I DON'T KNOW!?

MAYBE BECAUSE HE'S TOO MUCH OF A COWARD TO GO ASK IRIS HIMSELF?

OR IT'S BECAUSE I BIT HIM ONCE?

OR **MAYBE** IT'S BECAUSE I'M FRIENDS WITH THE **ONLY** KID HERE HE DOESN'T LIKE!

WHO KNOWS!?

YOU'RE BEING PARANOID

WHAT?

YOU HEARD ME

IF HE **REALLY** WANTED TO HURT YOU, HE WOULDN'T HAVE TAKEN YOU TO THE DOCTOR TO BEGIN WITH.

YOU'RE CLEARLY NOT **DYING**, OR ANYTHING

BUT HE MADE HER PUT OFF ANOTHER, **WAY** MORE IMPORTANT THOUNDING THING ANYWAY

THAT'TH A BIG DEAL FOR HIM.

HE WOULDN'T JUTHT **DO** THAT IF HE DIDN'T CARE ABOUT YOU. HE **HATETH** TALKING TO OTHER PEOPLE.

HE HATETH BEING **NEAR** OTHER PEOPLE

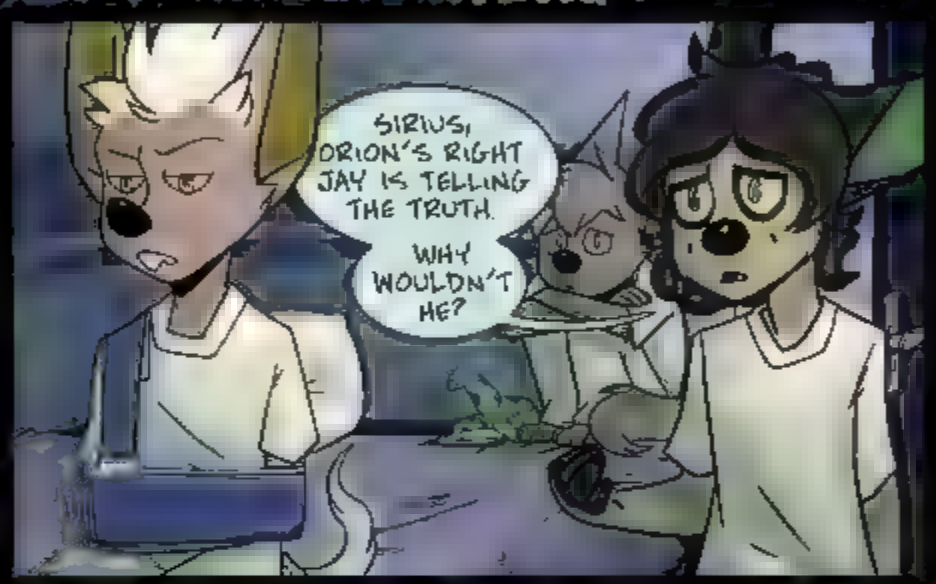
YOU MATTER TO HIM.

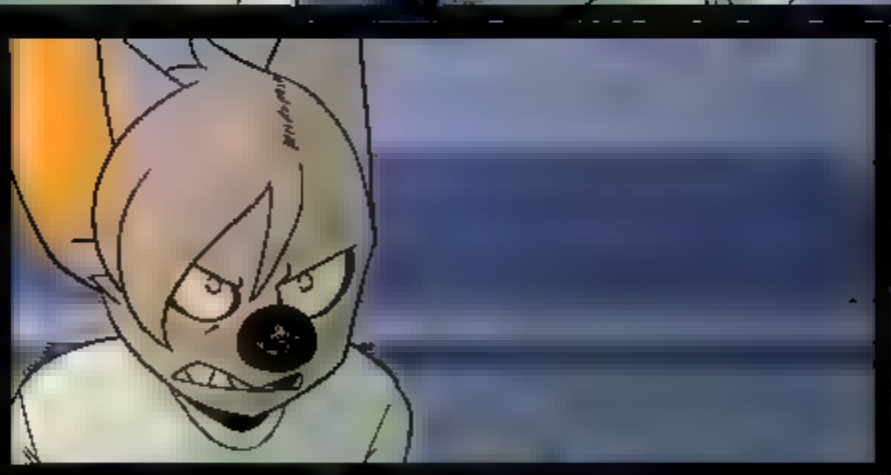
DON'T YOU **DARE** PRETEND YOU DON'T KNOW THAT

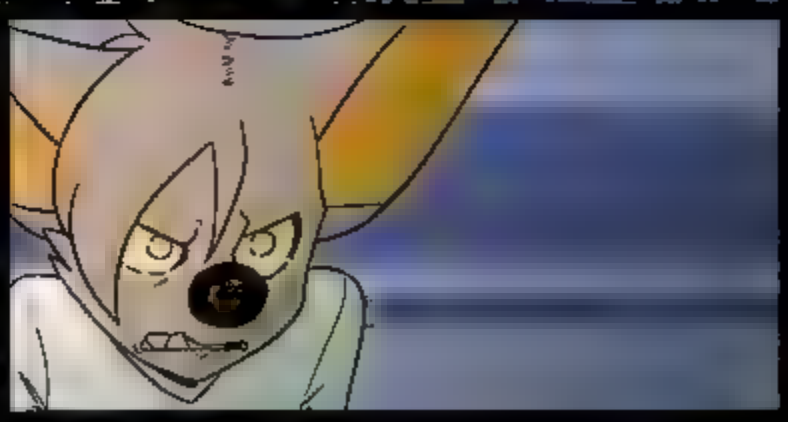
NOW QUIT ACTING LIKE A TOTAL **BRAT**, AND BE **GRATEFUL** YOU'RE NOT THE ONE HE'TH GOT A WEIRD PROBLEM WITH

WOW, WHAT'S YOUR PROBLEM!?

OH MY GOD, GUYS, PLEASE.


SIRIUS, ORION'S RIGHT JAY IS TELLING THE TRUTH.
WHY WOULDN'T HE?





I JUST WANNA BE NORMAL, OKAY!?

I WANT HIM TO BE LYING TO ME SO BEN CAN MAKE IT BETTER.

HE'S A JERK TO YOU **ALL** THE TIME, AND HE'S **ALWAYS** WRONG, SO WHY CAN'T HE JUST...

...BE A JERK TO ME NOW, TOO?

Y-YOU GET WHAT I MEAN, RIGHT?

SIRIUS...

...IF...THERE'S NOTHING YOU CAN DO ABOUT ANY OF THIS, THEN...
...I GUESS JUST DON'T WORRY ABOUT IT.

...BUT THAT DOESN'T SOLVE ANYTHING, THAT'S JUST IGNORING A PROBLEM.

WELL, THAT'S MY ADVICE. TAKE IT OR LEAVE IT.

JAY NEEDS ME TO DO SOME OTHER STUFF BESIDES THIS, SO I GOTTA GO.

YOU GUYS SHOULD PLAY OUTSIDE OR SOMETHING.

...SO MILO'S REALLY TIRED OF HEARING ABOUT THIS AND WANTS US TO GO FINISH THAT STORY WITH THE BIRDS FROM YESTERDAY.

...ACTUALLY? I AGREE WITH MILO.

EVEN IF HE ITH THUPER RUDE, YOU BRAT.

SORRY!

AND I AGREE WITH AQUILA, TOO.

I WANNA TAKE ADVANTAGE OF RIGEL BEING GONE WHILE I CAN, C'MON.